

Perceptions toward Law Librarianship as a Career Choice: A Study of Law Students in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study aimed to discover law students' perceptions of law librarianship as a career choice. The descriptive survey is the research method used for this study. The population consisted of undergraduate law students of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye and Babcock University, Iperu-Remo in Ogun State in the 2013/2014 academic session. The 2013/2014 academic session has 510 registered law students in Olabisi Onabanjo University, 269 students in Babcock University. Thirty percent of the population of law students in each school was sampled for the study. This translates to 234. 234 questionnaires was distributed. 223 questionnaires were returned representing 95.3% rate of response. Data collected were analyzed using frequency count and simple percentages. The study shows a low perception of law students toward law librarianship as a career choice. The study concluded with recommendations.

Keywords: Law librarianship, law students, career choice, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Babcock University

Introduction

Information is a veritable and indispensable resource for the development of any nation. People require and depend on information to play their roles in society. Law libraries exist to provide information resources in diverse formats to support research, teaching and development of prospective legal practitioners. Law libraries cannot perform their expected social functions without human resources. The law librarian is therefore the social engineer serving as the vital link between information and the user because the mere existence of legal information materials is not adequate to make an ordered society (Auyo, 2006). To ensure quality provision of information at the right time and in the desired format, law librarians are in place to acquire, organize, preserve and disseminate legal information.

The profession of law librarianship has not won the admiration and attraction of other professions like medicine, law and accounting. In short, according to Okoro (2009), librarianship is the least sought-after profession in Nigeria. The law librarian is however a dual degreed professional that possesses highly specialized knowledge, expertise, and experience in providing services that affect the property, lives, and liberty of their ultimate end users (Levor, n.d). They are specialized library professionals, highly skilled to offer an exceptional level of credibility and expertise because they possess competency as librarians and competency in the subject of law. The law librarian is also an academic staff expected to teach use of library and legal research. In spite of these, law students view law librarianship with apathy and do not like to pick law librarianship as a career choice.

Statement of the problem

Law librarianship is a special hybrid of the profession of librarianship and law, dedicated to the service of the legal profession. It is a specialized profession as law librarians are expected to possess competency as librarians and competency in the subject of law. Observations have shown a dearth of professionals with dual qualifications in law and library science to serve as law librarians. The fact that professionals with a degree in law would prefer to pursue a career in other fields than in the library and information profession will spell doom for the future of the specialized profession of law librarianship. This study therefore investigates to find out the perceptions of undergraduate law students toward law librarianship as a career choice.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are to

1. Find out the perceptions of law librarianship by law students.
2. Find out law students' attitude toward choosing law librarianship as career.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Librarianship is indisputably one of the world's earliest professions ranking on the same pedestal as with priesthood, medicine, law and accountancy (Dada, 2011). The profession of librarianship is indeed a full-fledged profession having met the standard attributes for professionalism. Rubin (2000) highlighted the traits of a

profession to include the following:

1. Possession of a body of theoretical knowledge that forms the intellectual foundation of the profession.
2. Permits a substantial amount of autonomy.
3. Exercises control over the conduct of its professionals through licensure and a code of ethics.
4. Possesses a dominant altruistic rather than self-interested purpose.
5. Possesses monopoly over the practice of the profession
6. Possesses professional associations.

Librarianship has met the major traits of a profession: it has a body of specialized knowledge, exercises control over the conduct of its professionals through licensure and a code of ethics, it is service-oriented, possesses monopoly over the practice of the profession and possesses professional associations. In spite of all these achievements that librarianship has gained in Nigeria, Okoro (2009) has found that the profession of librarianship is the least sought-after profession. Rubin (2000) attests that librarianship appears to have a relatively low status. Tella, Ayeni and Popoola (2007) identify factors that can influence the choice of a career in librarianship to include attractive salary, good condition of service and job security among others.

Law librarianship has come as a special hybrid of the profession of librarianship dedicated to the service of the legal profession, which on its own part strives on information. (Dada, 2011). Maloma (2006) argues that the law librarian should be a person of combined training and qualification as it is in all advanced countries of the world. Levor (n.d) also posits that law librarians should possess a law degree from a law school and a master's degree from a library school. Panella (1991) reports that in academic institutions, it is increasingly common to find the dual masters in library science and law degrees among law librarians. This is because the competencies required by law librarians fall into two categories: competency as a librarian and competency in the subject of law (Mersky and Leiter). Levor (n. d) believes that law librarians having passed a bar examination and practiced law, are highly skilled and specialized library professionals to offer an exceptional level of credibility and expertise. The standard of the Council of Legal Education of Nigeria requires that the law librarian possess a law degree and a masters degree in library studies.

Methodology

Location

Ogun state was created in 1976. It has ten universities, two of which run accredited law degree programme at 5 levels. The third university that runs an accredited law degree programme is the Crescent University, Abeokuta. The law degree programme at Crescent University is only at two levels. Hence it was not added for the study. The study covers the two universities in Ogun State that runs a law degree programme at 5 levels (100 level to 500 level): Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye and Babcock University, Iperu-Remo.

Study population

The descriptive survey is the research method used for this study. The population consisted of undergraduate law students of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State and Babcock University, Iperu-Remo, Ogun State in the 2013/2014 academic session. The 2013/2014 academic session has 510 registered law students in Olabisi Onabanjo University, 269 students in Babcock University. Thirty percent of the population of law students in each school was sampled for the study. This translates to 234. 234 questionnaires was distributed. 223 questionnaires were returned representing 95.3% rate of response. A breakdown of this population is shown in Table 1.

Presentation of findings

Table 1: Population and Sample Size

SCHOOL	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE
Olabisi Onabanjo University	510	153
Babcock University	269	81
TOTAL	779	234

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	92	41.3
Female	129	57.8
No response	2	0.9
Total	223	100

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents were females with 57.8% while males were 41.3%. 0.9% did not respond to whether they were male or female.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by level

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
100	38	17
200	42	18.8
300	64	28.7
400	45	20.2
500	34	15.3
Total	223	100%

Table 3 shows that 17% of the respondents were in 100 level, 18.8% in 200 level, 28.7% in 300 level, 20.2% in 400 level while 15.3% 500 level.

Table 4: Attitudes to Law Librarianship

	Yes	%	No	%	NR	%
Has anyone talked to you about being a librarian?	45	20.2	168	75.3	10	4.5
Will you be willing to study librarianship if given a scholarship to do so?	65	29.2	152	68.2	6	2.7
Have you thought of law librarianship as career choice?	20	9	197	88.3	6	2.7

From Table 4, 75.3% of respondents indicated that nobody has talked to them about being librarians, 20.2% indicate that they have been talked to about being librarians while. 4.5% did not respond. 68.2% indicated that they will not be willing to study librarianship if given scholarship to do so while 29.2% showed willingness to study librarianship if given scholarship to do so. 2.7% did not respond. 88.3% indicated that they had not thought of law librarianship as a career choice while 9% indicated that they had thought of law librarianship as career choice. 2.7% did not respond.

Table 5: Factors to consider for a career in law librarianship

Factors	Frequency	Percentage %
Academic status of law librarians	30	13.5
Working with information	65	29.2
Rendering services to others	37	16.6
Intellectually stimulating	65	29.2
Financially rewarding	61	27.4
Lecturing/teaching	46	20.6
Prospect of advancement	37	16.6

Table 5 shows that 29.1% of respondents consider law librarianship as a career choice because it is intellectually stimulating and also working with information. 27.4% indicate that they would consider the financial reward while 20.6% will consider teaching. The least considered factor was academic status of law librarians which attracted a response rate of 13.5%

Table 6: Perception of law librarianship as career choice

	A	%	SA	%	D	%	SD	%	N	%
Law librarianship is a worthwhile occupation for law students to consider as a career choice.	82	36.8	18	8.1	48	21.5	39	17.5	32	14.4
Law librarianship as a career choice is worth the sacrifice of getting a first degree in law.	53	23.8	31	13.9	60	26.9	53	23.8	28	12.6
Law librarianship is one of the best jobs of which I am aware.	36	16.1	20	9	68	30.5	67	30.04	28	12.6
Law librarianship is a good career choice for me.	32	14.4	11	4.9	40	17.9	50	22.4	22	9.9
I am convinced of the importance of law librarianship as a good career choice	58	26	19	8.5	65	29.2	45	20.2	31	13.9
I am sure I will enjoy a career as a law librarian.	38	17	7	3.14	77	34.5	56	25.11	32	14.4
I feel law librarianship could give me a number of advantages over other careers I could choose.	44	19.7	24	10.8	66	29.6	54	24.2	32	14.4
I am aware that law librarians are in high demand.	50	22.4	31	13.9	52	23.3	42	18.8	39	17.5
I can consider law librarianship as a career option if other options are closed.	87	39	23	10.3	48	21.5	37	16.6	20	9
I am attracted to law librarianship because of the academic status enjoyed by law librarians.	44	19.7	22	9.9	78	35	45	20.2	26	11.7
I can consider law librarianship as a career choice if the financial benefit is greater than other career choices.	63	28.3	60	26.9	51	22.9	31	13.9	18	8.1

Table 6 indicates that majority of respondents believe that law librarianship is a worthwhile occupation for law students to consider as a career choice with 44.9% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. However, a majority (50.7%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that law librarianship as a career choice is worth the sacrifice of getting a first degree in law. 60.5% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed to the fact that law librarianship is one of the best jobs they are aware of. 40.3% also disagreed or strongly disagreed that law librarianship is a good career choice for them. 49.4% are not convinced of the importance of law librarianship as a good career choice. A majority of respondents with 59.6% response either disagreed or strongly disagreed to enjoying a career as a law librarian. 53.8% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that law librarianship could give a number of advantages over other career choices. 42.1% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that law librarians are in high demand. However, 49.3% indicate that they would consider law librarianship as a career option if other options are closed. 55.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed to being attracted to law librarianship because of the academic status enjoyed by law librarians. However, 55.2% agreed or strongly agreed to consider law librarianship as a career choice if the financial benefit is greater than other career choices.

Discussion of Findings

The study showed that law librarianship was positively seen by law students as a career choice. However, more than half of the respondents believe that law librarianship as a career choice is not worth the sacrifice of getting a first degree in law. This finding is not entirely in consonance with that of Mosley (1999) who found in his study that law librarianship as a career choice is a worthwhile occupation for law students to consider as a career choice and also that law librarianship as a career choice is worth the sacrifice of having a degree in law.

A sizable percentage of respondents indicated that they would not consider studying librarianship, even if given a scholarship. This accords with the finding of Mosley (1999).

A swooping majority disagreed that law librarianship is one of the best jobs. This accord with the findings of Olayinka (2008) who found in his study that students saw librarianship as the least profession among others. Okoro (2009) also found in her study that librarianship is the least sought after profession. More than half of the respondents agreed to consider law librarianship as a career choice if the financial benefit is greater than other career choices. This aligns with the study of Newbutt and Sen (n. d) who found that low salary was a barrier facing young people wanting to enter the librarianship profession. Okoro (2009) also found in her study that attractive remuneration influence the choice of pursuing careers in other fields over librarianship.

Conclusion

The study shows a low perception of law students toward law librarianship as a career choice. Persons with law degrees have a number of careers from which to choose. It is therefore imperative that law librarianship needs to be promoted to law students in order to avoid a dearth of law librarians.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered based on the findings from this study:

1. The library and information profession needs to embark on massive awareness campaign about librarianship as a distinctive profession.
2. Law librarianship should be weaved into courses offered at law schools.
3. The library and information science body need to advocate for better remuneration for librarians.
4. Librarians need to hone their skills and be innovative in their service delivery in order paint a better and correct image of the profession.

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